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From Ehrlich to Guterres to Carney

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Body

It didn't take long for libertarian watchdogs to spring into action just after the New Year when an old environmental beast suddenly appeared on a U.S. news network howling about the looming end of civilization as we know it. The beast was 90-year-old Paul Ehrlich, whose 1968 error-filled book, *The Population Bomb*, has been described as "The book that incited a worldwide fear of overpopulation."

More than five decades after *The Population Bomb* swept up the environmental movement with a host of false alarms, Ehrlich rose from the archives of extinct species on New Year's Day with an appearance on CBS News'60 Minutes. In a segment dedicated to renewing the old population fears, Ehrlich regurgitated his views from 1968, when he famously said the battle to feed all of humanity had been lost and that within a decade the "world will undergo famines - hundreds of millions of people are going to starve to death."

Undeterred by this false prophesying and other 1968 *Population Bomb* fables, Ehrlich told 60 Minutes'viewers that in this year, 2023, humanity "is very busily sitting on a limb that we're sawing off." The next few decades, he said, "will be the end of the kind of civilization we're used to." The CBS team proceeded to use Ehrlich as a wise prophet of ***doom*** supporting the idea that the world's economic system and the planet's eight billion inhabitants are heading for self-destruction.

Within days of the 60 Minutes episode, America's market-oriented think-tanks and commentators had swung into action. "Wrong on 60 Minutes and for Almost 60 years," said the headline at the Foundation for Economic Education. On Jan. 3, The Wall Street Journal editorialized: "The Paul Ehrlich Apocalypse is Back." At Reason magazine, veteran Ehrlich critic Ronald Bailey said 60 Minutes "should be ashamed of promoting Ehrlich's oft-debunked nonsense." Cato Institute fellow Marian Tupy wrote that Ehrlich is "Still Wrong!" Along with others, each of these commentaries on the 60 Minutes episode document how and why Ehrlich's outlook has been and remains nonsense. Cato's Marian Tupy notes that the global crude death rate per 1,000 inhabitants has dropped from 12.9 per cent 50 years ago to 8.1 per cent today. World production of food has soared, thanks to technological and economic advances that involve using less land. Ehrlich says a global population of 3.5 billion is optimal, even though human well-being continues to expand as the population tops eight billion.

But there is more to the Ehrlich critique than itemizing the flaws in his population bomb analysis. As The Wall Street Journal's editorial writers put it, "As with Thomas Malthus, the father of ***doom***-and-gloomsayers, the repeated failure of Mr. Ehrlich's predictions of catastrophe to materialize never seem to discourage those who believe human beings are breeding and consuming our way to destruction."

The Journal mentions no names, but it could have. The current global crop of ***doom***-and-gloomsayers includes a cabal of leaders at the highest echelon of the global policy system who routinely regurgitate Ehrlich's message.

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How many more times will citizens of the world be subjected to the rants of António Guterres, the United Nations Secretary-General who grabs flash media attention every few months with dire warnings that the world is coming to an end unless we all accept the idea that the planet is nature's home and a growing population of human consumers eager for better lifestyles is killing nature and turning the Earth into a death star.

Guterres, a former head of The Socialist International, echoed Ehrlich's rhetoric at the opening of the UN COP27 **climate** conference in Egypt last November. "In just days, our planet's population will cross a new threshold. The eight-billionth member of our human family will be born ... We are on a highway to **climate** hell with our foot still on the accelerator." (See The Population Bombers: 1968-2023, below.)

A few weeks later, at the COP15 biodiversity conference in Montreal, Guterres laced into the "Unsustainable production and monstrous consumption habits (that) are degrading our world. Humanity has become a weapon of mass extinction ... with a million species at risk of disappearing forever ... Humanity's war on nature is ultimately a war on ourselves."

A few days later at the same COP15 conference in Montreal, UN global **climate** finance guru Mark Carney carried on in Ehrlich mode when he used a favourite Ehrlich metaphor, the great fourth mass extinction that occurred 200 million years ago. "While that fourth mass extinction 200 million years ago was an act of God, today's sixth mass extinction is the act of humanity. We've created a new era - the Anthropocene - in which our actions are changing our Earth's **climate** and destroying its biodiversity."

Interesting that Carney sees the alleged extinction millions of years ago to be an "Act of God" rather than an act of nature. It's a conclusion that obscures the reality that much of what humanity struggles with is the uncompromising forces of nature, including hurricanes, volcanoes, droughts and occasional meteorites.

Behind the return of Ehrlich and the rise of his successors Guterres and Carney lies the science of human evolution, nature and earlier extinctions, most of which is speculative. In a 2009 retrospective on The Population Bomb and its errors, Ehrlich observed that "Science never produces certainty." Which is not quite true. Gravity still draws apples from trees. But it is not certain in science that population growth draws humans into mass extinction.

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Graphic

Cbs; Paul Ehrlich, author of the controversial 1968 book The Population Bomb, predicted that "hundreds of millions" would starve to death in the 1970s due to overpopulation.;

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